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Michigan youths adopt new life More than 250 foster children get permanent homes

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MONROE - When Anthony Martinez realized his mother and stepfather had taken off and left him behind, he knew who to call.

The 15-year-old phoned his aunt and uncle, Phillip and Amy Blossom, who promptly took him in and supported him while his mother's parental rights were terminated.

Since that day in February, 2002, Anthony has been a part of the Blossoms' Lambertville household. Yesterday, as part of the first Michigan Adoption Day, it became official.

More than 250 children across the state were granted new families as judges in 34 courts signed the official paperwork. The day was in conjunction with National Adoption Day, held Saturday, when across the country, children who were one-time wards of the state became the newest members of loving homes.



Judge Pam Moskwa signs the paperwork granting the adoption of Anthony Martinez, 16, center. Flanking Anthony are members of his new family: from left, Amy, Dylan, Phillip, and Alexa Blossom. (THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH)



Anthony Martinez films his adoptive cousin, Brendan Van Slyke, while his adoptive father, Phillip Blossom, watches. (THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH)

"I feel better waking up in a place where I know I'm wanted instead of a foster home where I don't know anybody," said Anthony, now 16, who is an aspiring rapper known as Hype. "I feel a lot more lucky than the kids who have to go through the foster home process."

In Monroe County, officials estimate about 100 adoptions will be completed this year. In Lenawee County, probate judges conduct between 50 and 70 adoptions a year; in Hillsdale County, the annual number is 20 to 25.

According to the Family Independence Agency, the goal of Michigan's Adoption Services Program is to place children in adoption as quickly as possible following the termination of parental rights.

Whenever possible, the children are placed with relatives or foster parents, and siblings are kept together.

Family and friends lined up yesterday in Monroe County Probate Court, where 14 children were being adopted into nine families. Inside Judge Pamela Moskwa's courtroom, Anthony put aside his fear of the future and signed a consent form allowing the judge to make his aunt and uncle his mom and dad.

"We wanted to do this so he'll always know he has a family, always," Mrs. Blossom said.

But adoption officials warn that children available for adoption sometimes have special psychological needs as a result of previous broken-home situations, and a special type of family is necessary. Hillsdale County Probate Judge Michael Nye agreed.

Calling adoptions "the best part my job," Judge Nye said his court institutes a six-month waiting period for all potential adoptions to ensure the family is a good match.

"We try to really look at all the issues in that family to make sure that if we're placing that child in that home, they've thought about all the issues," he said.

Tom and Dawn Desmond know all too well the challenges that can come with adoption. The Ottawa Lake couple adopted a son, now 3, who was born to a drug-addicted mother. Yesterday, they were back in court to finalize the adoption of their new 11-month-old daughter, also born to a drug-addicted mother.

"My heart's back up here instead of in my stomach," said Mrs. Devon. "I was just waiting for the judge to say she's ours forever."

Chief Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan applauded the event and all the families that were created. But she added a reminder that there are still about 400 children statewide without an identified adoptive family.

"So as we celebrate - and we should celebrate this day - let's not forget the other children who are waiting," she said. "Let's hope that this event draws attention to them and their need for safe, loving homes."
